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Abstract

Little research has been done in the area of counseling within the secondary school. This research was designed to analyze verbatim transcriptions of secondary school counseling interviews in order to establish a description of school counselor verbal behavior. A total of 50 transcripts involving 50 different counselees were used. The interviews were obtained from 14 different Ohio high schools and consisted of 25 male and 25 female counselees in grades 9--12. Ten counselors with experience acted as judges. The classification process resulted in ten categories: (1) conversational, (2) information giving, (3) passivity, (4) defense reaction, (5) disconcertation, (6) support seeking, (7) exploration, (8) conclusion, (9) information gathering, and (10) adaptation. The results of this study indicate that counselor sub-roles can be located, labeled, and defined, and that a classification system was developed which could serve as a basis for studying counselor verbal behavior. (Author/KJ)

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A TAXONOMY OF COUNSELEE BEHAVIOR

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Research concerning the counseling process has, for the most part, been limited to the experimental laboratory or college counseling center. On a comparative basis, little work has been accomplished in the area of counseling within the secondary school (1).

The present research was designed to analyze verbatim transcriptions of secondary school counseling interviews in order to establish a description of school counselee verbal behavior. This analysis has been described in the following way:

Content analysis denotes a research technique for the systematic ordering of the content of communication processes. Typically it involves procedures for division of content into units, for assignment of each unit to a category or to a position on a metric, and for summarizing coded units and arriving at inferences concerning the significance of the summations (2).

The counselor sub-role studies conducted by Danskin (3), Hoffman (4), Campbell (5), and Troth (6) have pointed out that the analysis of interview behavior into subordinate roles has been a particularly meaningful approach to typescript research. Following their lead, the present research utilized the sub-role as a unit in describing school counselee verbal behavior. The sub-role was defined as a distinguishable period within the interview in which the verbal behavior of the counselee was judged to be consistent. It concerns the smaller or subordinate role which an individual assumes within his larger role as a school counselee. For example, at the beginning of an interview a counselee may function in a submissive sub-role. Later in the interview he may become aggressive or hostile toward the counselor. Then, continuing the interaction, the counselee may play a subordinate role of questioning the counselor in order to gain certain information.

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Since no previous sub-role work could be found dealing specifically with the school counselee, the present study represents an attempt to provide basic information concerning school counselee sub-role behavior.

METHOD

The data utilized in this study were collected from verbatim transcriptions of counseling interviews between high school counselors and secondary school counselees. A total of fifty typescripts involving fifty different counselees was used in the data collection process. The interviews were obtained from fourteen different Ohio high schools and consisted of twenty-five male counselees and twenty-five female counselees in grades 9-12.

Ten counselors with experience in secondary school counseling acted as judges in the study. After studying a manual of directions, the judges participated in a training session designed to explain further the nature and purpose of the investigation and to clarify any misunderstanding concerning the rating process. Typescripts were then arranged so that each one would be read independently by three different judges. Transition points between sub-roles were identified. In locating transition points, the judges were asked to record that point at which the counselee gave evidence of assuming a different sub-role with the counselor. Two ratings were counted as agreement if the counselee statements designated as transition points were no more than three counselee statements apart. If disagreement occurred, the sub-role was discarded from the study. The judges were also asked to label and define each sub-role unit. In labeling and defining the sub-role unit no attempt was made to relate the units to any existing method of classifying sub-role units or any existing theoretical orientations. Thus, each judge was given considerable freedom. Snedecor's (7) Intraclass Correlation Formula was utilized to estimate the

reliability of the ratings on transition points. Seventy-eight percent of the judges' ratings were at or above .301, which was assumed to be a reliable estimate for rating typescripts.

A taxonomy was developed by a content analysis of the judges' sub-role labels and definitions. In categorizing the sub-roles, set operation was utilized. Sub-roles were considered as a universal set. A category or label was selected as a starting point and all remaining sub-roles were studied to see if they could be included or excluded from the set. From the remaining sub-roles, another category was selected and the same procedure applied. After the initial classification was completed, the categories were restudied and intersection and union of sub-sets were worked out. The judges' sub-role definitions aided considerably in the categorization process.

RESULTS

The classification process resulted in ten categories:

Conversational

In playing this sub-role, the counselee participates verbally with the counselor in such a way that the verbal exchange takes on a social tone. No new ideas are presented. The interaction in this sub-role is open-ended and is not intended as a means of accomplishing any stated purpose.

Information Giving

This sub-role is characterized by the counselee giving a verbal account of things or events which have happened to him. The counselee is giving his view as he sees it at that particular time. He may be providing information about himself in relation to a certain situation, or he could be revealing his immediate problem to the counselor. This information may be given voluntarily or it may be simply answering questions. In either case, the counselee actively takes part in the interaction by providing relevant information.

Passivity

This sub-role is exemplified by a verbal behavior of indifference toward the counselor, the interview, or a particular subject. It differs from the defense-reaction sub-role in that the counselee is not reactionary. The counselee indicates a lack of enthusiasm or a willingness to cooperate.

It is typified by yes or no responses with no additional information to counselor questions. The counselee verbal response simply indicates that he has heard the counselor and nothing else. There is little or no verbal behavior on the part of the counselee.

Defense-reaction

This sub-role is exemplified by a certain period during the interview in which the counselee's speech indicates that he is threatened. The counselee may be rebelling against a person, society, or any force that may be acting on him at that time. In some situations, the counselor may be a threat to him in which there is always a definite lack of rapport. During this sub-role the counselee may seem rather skeptical about the usefulness of the interview. In all cases, the counselee is indicating a defensive attitude.

Disconcertation

A counselee playing this sub-role reacts in such a way that his statements indicate a confused or ambivalent behavior. The counselee may appear to be overcome by circumstances beyond his control. An inability to effectively cope with his environment is presented. Pressures acting on the counselee appear so great that orderly thought is difficult. The counselee is indicating that he does not know what course to follow.

Support-seeking

The counselee playing this sub-role is asking for reassurance from the counselor. A need for approval is presented by the counselee. Typically, the counselee is unsure of his social role and has a strong desire to be accepted. This sub-role differs from the disconcertation sub-role in that he is aware of his problem but desires counselor support prior to implementing a course of action.

Exploration

This sub-role is apparent when the counselee is attempting to sort through feelings, examine possible reasons for such feelings, or consider alternatives. The interaction is on a feeling level. For instance, he may be trying to solve a particular problem by discussing various solutions with the counselor. This sub-role is characterized by an exchange of ideas or plans on a constructive basis. The counselee is attempting to arrive at some kind of a solution.

Conclusion

In this sub-role the counselee indicates a definite measure of relief from a particular situation. The counselee is often self-assertive in that he states what he wants and what he does not want. He may be expressing ways of attaining predetermined goals. Almost always, he expresses an attitude of going after what he wants. It is further characterized by the point at which the counselee makes a choice from alternatives available.

Information Gathering

This sub-role is characterized by counselee statements which are directed at securing relevant information from the counselor. The basic activity is one of information input and the source of that information is the counselor. The counselee is obtaining specific information about some topic.

Adaptation

The interaction on the part of the counselee in this sub-role is typified by a genuine concern and willingness to accept the present situation. The verbal behavior of the counselee indicates that he seeks cooperation with the counselor to the degree that he is sympathetic and reassuring toward the counselor. In an extreme case, a reversal of roles is indicated.

CONCLUSION

The results of the present study indicate that counselee sub-roles can be located, labeled, and defined. A classification system was developed which could serve as a basis for studying counselee verbal behavior. However, additional research is needed to yield a better understanding of this dimension. For example, a comparable investigation using a larger sample of school counselees would present a more comprehensive view of counselee sub-roles. The information found in this study could also be used in future research concerned with counselee role expectations and studies of interview outcome within the secondary school setting. Typescripts do not allow for the identification of physical gestures and facial expressions. Further research is needed to determine the influence of these characteristics on the counselee sub-role. And, finally the taxonomy might be used to investigate the relationship of the sub-role to other dimensions of counseling behavior.